



# Department of Justice

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## **ATTORNEY GENERAL ALBERTO R. GONZALES OUTLINES ANTI-FRAUD PRIORITIES TO PROTECT THE INTEGRITY OF RELIEF EFFORTS IN HURRICANE KATRINA-STRICKEN REGION**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales travels to Mississippi and Louisiana today with Vice President Dick Cheney to tour areas devastated by Hurricane Katrina and outline priorities for the newly established Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud and insurance fraud.

In a planned visit to Gulfport, Miss., the Attorney General will meet with Department of Justice personnel who are working out of the Jackson office. In Louisiana, the Attorney General plans to visit a law enforcement detention center in New Orleans and meet with Justice Department staff, including personnel from the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Eastern District of Louisiana (New Orleans), who are presently working out of offices in Baton Rouge.

Recent history, including Hurricane Ivan and the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, has shown that some criminals seek to profit from disaster by means of fraud, and recent reports indicate that fraudulent Internet sites designed to lure those seeking to donate to Hurricane Katrina relief efforts have already been posted.

The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force – chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division – includes members from the FBI, the Federal Trade Commission, the Postal Inspector's Office, and the Executive Office of the United States Attorneys, among others. The Task Force will be directed to track referrals of potential cases and complaints, coordinate with law enforcement agencies to initiate investigations, match referrals with the appropriate U.S. Attorney's offices, and ensure timely and effective prosecution of Katrina fraud cases. The Task Force will be national in scope, working with state and local law enforcement and state attorneys general to identify cases, and will report back to the Attorney General on a periodic basis.

"We cannot allow the kindness of Americans to be exploited in this time of disaster and crisis," said Attorney General Gonzales. "This Task Force will help ensure that those offering a helping hand do not themselves become the victims of fraud, and that the money and support they so graciously and generously offer goes to the intended recipients – the many victims of Hurricane Katrina."

The Task Force will work aggressively with a focus on specific areas of fraud, with the ability to alter its focus if necessary to adapt to whatever fraudulent schemes are created by those who are looking for illegal gain. Examples of those types of fraud include:

- Fraudulent Charities: Cases in which individuals falsely hold themselves out as agents of a legitimate charity, or create a “charity” that is in fact a sham;
- Identity Theft: Cases in which the identities of innocent victims are “stolen” and assumed by criminals who convert the assets of, or otherwise defraud, the victims, and;
- Insurance Fraud: Cases in which false or inflated insurance claims are filed;
- Government Benefit Fraud: Cases in which individuals file false applications seeking benefits to which they are not entitled.

Several existing government websites and resources are available to obtain information about, and report instances of, Katrina-related fraud. The FBI website, [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov), contains updated alerts about particular types of charity-related frauds. Members of the public can also report instances of fraud on the Website for the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Center, at [www.ic3.gov](http://www.ic3.gov). The Fraud Section of the Criminal Division maintains additional information about Internet-related scams at [www.internetfraud.usdoj.gov](http://www.internetfraud.usdoj.gov). The Federal Trade Commission provides additional information at its website, [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov), and a toll-free FTC hotline, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357, TTY/TDD: 202-326-2502), also allows consumers to report suspected fraud schemes, including Katrina-related fraud.

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